

PlanFirst Program Application - May 15, 2016

Introduction: The Department of Community Affairs' PlanFirst Program rewards local governments that clearly demonstrate success with implementing their local comprehensive plan. To apply for PlanFirst designation, a local government must have Qualified Local Government certification and be current on required reporting to DCA. (To check status of both, please visit <http://www.georgiaplanning.com/planners/planreview/default.asp>).

A multi-agency review panel will evaluate a number of indicators of community success with plan implementation to select communities for this designation. All of these indicators are equally important, but size of the community is taken into consideration in the evaluation so that communities of various sizes are equally competitive for PlanFirst designation.

Instructions: Please answer all the following questions thoroughly, attaching additional pages where necessary, so that the reviewers have sufficient information to measure the success of your comprehensive plan implementation. Supporting documents might include: news articles, legal ads, lists of attendees, letters of support or other evidence of local involvement and commitment to successful plan implementation activities in your community. *Total application length, including supporting information and support letters, must not exceed 20 pages. Text areas will expand as needed.*

Applicant government	Cook County
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Contact person; title	Faye Hughes, County Administrator
Application prepared by	Cook County / Southern Georgia Regional Commission
I, the undersigned authorized representative of the applicant, certify that to the best of my knowledge the information in this application is true and correct.	
Name of authorized official signing; title	Randy Lane, Chair, Cook County Board of Commissioners <i>Randy Lane</i>
Date	5/1/16
Signature	

PRE-REQUISITES

A. (1) We have a good track record of maintaining our Qualified Local Government status **and** submitting required reports to DCA, including the current Report of Local Government Finances. (To check status, please visit <http://www.georgiaplanning.com/planners/planreview/default.asp>).

QLG status:	<u>yes</u>	no
Local government reports:	<u>yes</u>	no

All required reports have been submitted in accordance with stated deadlines. The next updates are due 6/30/2020.

A. (2) We have attained the Minimum Standard for performance as called for in our regional commission's regional comprehensive plan.

<u>yes</u>	no
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Cook County and its municipalities have achieved, or are in the process of achieving, all the Minimum Standards called for in the current adopted SGRC Regional Plan.

For each of the following indicators, fully explain how your community addresses this indicator; identifying specific examples and resulting local successes. (Each indicator will be scored 1, 3 or 5 points, except indicators j. and t. which may score up to 10 points.) Add exhibits and examples as needed to tell your story.

INDICATOR: GOALS

B. The Goals (or Vision) section of our comprehensive plan is supported by the community and its leadership.

The Goals of the 2015 Greater Cook County Comprehensive Plan (listed on p. 13 of the Comp Plan Update) were developed by community members and community leaders working together in a series of workshops through a transparent, cooperative process. In order to ensure active engagement and participation by the public in these workshops, the Comprehensive Plan update process was widely advertised in local news media and via the Internet. A list of stakeholders was systematically assembled, representing a broad range of organizations and backgrounds, and the stakeholders were continually involved throughout the planning process. The goals of the previous (2010) Comprehensive Plan Update were reviewed, and found to be still applicable to the community. This continued applicability shows that the goals are more than just temporary; they have enduring relevance to the community as a road map for the future of Cook County and its Cities, and are fully supported by the community and its leadership.

C. The Goals are both ambitious and achievable for the community.

Cook County has a good track record of successfully completing projects identified in our Community Work Program. The goals that guide the development of the Work Program build upon Cook County's existing strengths and are achievable given the high level of ongoing commitment and effort that exists on the part of all stakeholders. At the same time, the Goals are

ambitious in that their achievement will require continuous effort and cooperation between the County, the cities within it, and entities outside the county (for example, at the state and federal level) that can provide resources and funding.

One example is Goal #2: “Protect, preserve, and promote the historic and cultural resources of Cook County through such measures as regulations, adaptive reuse, and tourism and education programs focused on historic preservation.” In 2014, the SOWEGA building, a key historic resource located in downtown Adel, was flagged as one of the 10 statewide Places in Peril by the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation. Through a partnership between Cook County, the City of Adel, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, the building was renovated and put into adaptive reuse. The Chamber of Commerce office is now housed in the building. This project, which was also in the Comprehensive Plan Work Program, is just one example of the ways in which this ambitious, yet achievable goal is being achieved.

D. The Goals steer local decision-making on a continuous basis.

Cook County uses its Comprehensive Plan as a guide for making sound planning decisions that impact the community’s growth and development. The Goals are broad aspirational statements that provide a key role in guiding these growth decisions since they provide a road map for the County’s future. One recent project that was steered by the Goals was the expansion of the Cook County Airport, with an extended runway and new terminal building. This project worked to implement Goal #3 (the Economic Development goal) and Goal #7 (the Transportation goal).

In addition, the Goals are used on a regular basis to guide zoning decisions. The Planning Commissioners and the Building and Zoning Administrator consult the Comprehensive Plan regarding zoning decisions and use the Goals as overall guidance. The Goals also steer the decisions regarding what projects will be included in the Community Work Program.

E. Consistent progress is being made at achieving the Goals.

Cook County continues to strive to implement the Comprehensive Plan through projects listed in the Community Work Program, which are guided by the Goals and help to achieve them. From 2011 to 2015, activities were completed that relate to all of the 8 Goals. Examples are given in the table below.

GOAL	WORK PROGRAM PROJECTS THAT WORK TOWARD ACHIEVING GOAL
<u>Goal 1:</u> Conserve and protect the functions and values of the natural resources of Cook County for future generations’ appropriate use and enjoyment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed Project: Continue to support the development of Reed Bingham State Park
<u>Goal 2:</u> Protect, preserve, and promote the historic and cultural resources of Cook County through such measures as regulations, adaptive reuse, and tourism and education programs focused on historic preservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed Project: Provide participation on the Greater Cook County Historic Preservation Task Force

GOAL	WORK PROGRAM PROJECTS THAT WORK TOWARD ACHIEVING GOAL
<u>Goal 3:</u> Improve the Cook County economy by developing and enhancing new and existing strengths that will draw new businesses, expand existing businesses, diversify the local economy, help Cook County compete in the regional economy, and ensure that overall community growth and development benefits all segments of the population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed Project: Continue to support the IDA efforts to prepare financial packages for existing and new businesses/industries in Greater Cook County
<u>Goal 4:</u> Provide opportunities for homeownership and housing resources for all citizens of Cook County through public/private partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project scheduled for completion by FY2017: Build Public Housing
<u>Goal 5:</u> Ensure the highest quality living environment possible through a mixture of compatible land uses and character areas reflecting the needs and desires of the local residents and their vision of Cook County. The goal shall be implemented through strict enforcement of the zoning ordinances and building codes based on the objectives and policies that follow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed Project: Develop a Unified Land Use Plan/Ordinance Project Underway: Develop floodplain elevations for the County
<u>Goal 6:</u> Ensure that needed community facilities such as water, sewer, solid waste, police, fire, and EMS are provided in an effective, environmentally sound, safe, and economic system, consistent with present demand and future growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed Project: Coordinate efforts of the various organizations to improve the ISO rating in the unincorporated areas Project Underway: Upgrade all sewer and storm water systems to meet current regulatory requirements and capacity needs. Project underway: Continue to maintain public sewer and storm water services.
<u>Goal 7:</u> Provide a safe and efficient transportation system which addresses the future needs of Cook County for movement of people and freight, and which considers the social, economic, energy, and environmental effects of the transportation system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Underway: Continue to maintain all roads and streets, including paving and resurfacing of dirt and asphalt facilities.
<u>Goal 8:</u> Establish effective coordination measures among all pertinent public and quasi-public entities to best maintain Cook County's quality of life and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project scheduled for completion by FY2020: Plan and develop a new recreational complex and expand recreational services throughout the county

INDICATOR: LEADERSHIP

F. We have effective planning staff or another suitable arrangement for handling community planning matters.

Planning in Cook County is overseen by the County Manager, Faye Hughes, and the Building and Zoning Administrator, Chris Davis. Regina Castleberry is the Administrative Assistant for Building and Zoning and responds to zoning inquiries as well as handling other administrative matters related to planning. In addition to Cook County's own highly experienced staff, we receive contractual technical assistance from the Southern Georgia Regional Commission on planning and zoning issues. The SGRC's staff includes three AICP-certified planners. Two of these certified planners assisted with the development of Cook County's current Comprehensive Plan and are available to the County on an ongoing basis to ensure that planning needs and goals are met. Lastly, the Cook County Economic Development Commission and the Chamber of Commerce are involved in shaping the County's future and collaborate with the governments of the County and Cities on an ongoing basis with regard to planning-related matters.

G. We have an active planning commission or similar body to steer local planning decisions.

Cook County has a very active and engaged Planning Commission Board that steers local planning decisions. The Board meets every month. The Board consists of ten members: one member for each of the five County districts, two for the City of Adel, and one each for the Cities of Cecil, Lenox, and Sparks.

H. We have a regular local plan effectiveness evaluation process (such as annual planning retreats of elected leadership).

The Greater Cook Planning Commission monitors and evaluates plan effectiveness through regular meetings. In addition, the effectiveness of our local plan is evaluated by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission as part of our ongoing planning assistance contract with the SGRC.

I. All local officials (both elected and appointed) involved in local planning processes have recently attended training in how to use the plan effectively. Please indicate what trainings and the date(s) attended.

All our County Commissioners are either certified or working toward certification (in which case they will be certified by the end of the year). Our Commissioners attend Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) training events at the Capital Connection Conference each February, the Annual Meeting each April/May, and the Legislative Leadership Conference each October. Therefore, the last trainings our Commissioners received were as follows:

- *ACCG Annual Meeting – April 2015*
- *ACCG Capital Connection Conference – February 2015*
- *ACCG Legislative Leadership Conference – October 2014*

J. Provide up to ten of your best recent examples where the plan steered a key local decision, with pertinent plan references (attach additional sheets as needed).

1. The recent rezoning of 10 acres of land from Agricultural to Light Industrial and annexation into the City of Adel was guided by the Comprehensive Plan. The land will be the site for Custom Ag Formulators, Inc., and is in the Industrial Character Area in the County's Future

Development Map (see p. 94 of the Comprehensive Plan). The development of the industrial corridor in which this property is located, between I-75 and US-41, is a priority listed in the Work Program (see p. 46 of the Comprehensive Plan).

The following is an excerpt from a news article in the *Adel New Tribune* (Dec. 9, 2015), about the Custom Ag property rezoning.

Adel considers annexation for new industry

By Charles Shiver

The Adel Mayor/Council held a public hearing Monday, Dec. 7, on a request to annex a 10-acre tract and a 2.681-acre tract, off of U.S. Highway 41 south of Adel, into the Adel city limits for the new Custom Ag Formulators industry.

Williams Investment Co. brought the petition requesting annexation of the property and rezoning from Agriculture (AU) to Heavy Industrial (H-I).

Brent Dixon, chairman of the Adel Industrial Development Authority, spoke in favor of the request.

He said the Fresno, Calif.-based Custom Ag Formulators plans to locate the company's new facility here to reflect its large market share in the Southeast. The industry plans to build a 20,000-square-foot facility and then possibly expand to 40,000 square feet for future business growth, Dixon said. Custom Ag Formulators will be hiring locally, 16 employees initially.

2. The Comprehensive Plan steered the decision to expand the Cook County Airport (see Policy 1.2, p. 30, and Work Program, p. 46). The Airport is described in more detail as a key project in this application (please see Section T).



Figure 1. Cook County Airport (image source: Google Earth).

3. The Plan steered the decision to undertake renovation of the SOWEGA building (see Policy 1.5, p. 31, and Work Program, p. 49). The SOWEGA building is described in more detail as a key project in this application (please see Section T).



Figure 2. SOWEGA Building.

4. The decision to extend the natural gas lines was guided by the Comprehensive Plan (see p. 50). Please see Section T of this application for more information on this project.
5. The decision to bring in the new Walmart Supercenter was steered by economic development policies and Work Program items in the Comprehensive Plan (see Policy 2.1, p. 31 and Work Program, p. 46). Please see Section T of this application for more information on this project.



Figure 3. Adel Walmart Supercenter under construction (Photo by Michael Rivera).

6. A new road, J-M Drive extension, was recently completed. This was a Community Work Program item (“Extend JM Drive” – see p. 40 of the Comprehensive Plan). This also works toward achieving Goal #7 in the Comprehensive Plan (p. 13).



Figure 4. Aerial view of the new J-M Drive Extension alongside I-75 (image source: Google Earth).

7. A new road, the Alabama Road truck bypass, is currently in phase 3. This was an item in the Community Work Program (“Construction of the Alabama Road project” – see p. 40 of the Comprehensive Plan). This project also works toward achieving Goal #7 in the Comprehensive Plan (p. 13).



Figure 5. Alabama Road truck bypass under construction, connecting to the Walmart Supercenter (image source: Google Earth).

INDICATOR: PARTICIPATION

K. Our comprehensive plan was prepared with multiple community input opportunities.

The 2015 Greater Cook County Comprehensive Plan Update was prepared with many opportunities for public input through a variety of avenues, including community workshops, public hearings, e-mail, phone, and social media. The plan update process began with a public kick-off hearing that was advertised in local news sources as well as on the Southern Georgia Regional Commission's website. The core elements of the plan were then developed through three well-attended public workshops, in which input was gathered from stakeholders (including members of the public) and incorporated into the plan. Throughout this plan development process, opportunities were given for the public to address comments to the County and Cities, as well as to the Southern Georgia Regional Commission staff; and any comments received were incorporated into the plan. After the three workshops, a public hearing to transmit the draft of the plan for DCA review was advertised in local news sources. The transmittal hearing gave the public the opportunity to address any comments regarding the plan to the local government. In addition, comments regarding the plan were accepted continually until the plan's adoption, by mail, e-mail, phone, and social media. The plan was adopted via public hearings, which included opportunities for public comment, at the County Commission meeting (again, advertised in local news outlets and on the SGRC website) and at the City Council meetings of the four cities. In addition to the multiple community input opportunities that were available during the plan update process, public input regarding the plan continues to be received and recorded, and can be incorporated into the continually evolving plan in the form of comprehensive plan amendments.

L. The community input received during plan preparation influenced the content of the plan.

The 2015 Greater Cook County Comprehensive Plan Update is the community's plan. There was community involvement throughout the planning process, starting with the kickoff meeting up to and including the final public hearing to adopt the plan. During the planning process, many assumptions and ideals were adjusted based on input from the community. For example, the Character Areas, which guide future development in the community, were adjusted extensively based on input recorded during a public workshop in which the draft Character Area Maps were marked up by participants. The openness of the planning process, and the variety of ways to participate, led to a plan that was built on consensus from a wide range of stakeholders and interests. The community shaped the plan and has ownership of it.

M. Our steering committee that guided development of the plan included local leaders and elected officials.

The steering committee included elected officials, including County Commissioners and the Mayors of the four Cities, as well as appointed officials, such as the Supervisor of Elections. The steering committee also included local leaders such as the President/CEO of the Adel/Cook County Chamber of Commerce, as well as the city managers and/or city clerks of the four Cities.

N. We have an active, ongoing outreach process for soliciting input on planning matters from a broad spectrum of the community, including non-traditional populations, and the resulting input is listened to by community leaders.

Local organizations, such as Concerned Citizens for Cook County and local activist citizens, assist us with our outreach by acting as liaisons between community leaders and the public,

especially non-traditional populations. In addition, we have roundtable meetings every Friday in which elected and non-elected leaders meet to discuss the direction the county is heading.

O. We have active advocates for plan implementation (such as activist citizens, organizations or neighborhood groups) that are listened to by community leaders.

Several groups and activist citizens are continually and actively engaged in advocating for plan implementation, such as the group mentioned above, Concerned Citizens for Cook County. There are many public avenues for these groups, organizations, and citizens to communicate with community leaders, including roundtable meetings and other public meetings (such as County Commission and City Council meetings), as well as avenues of direct contact such as mail, e-mail, phone, and social media. The continual input of our local advocates, which our community leaders take to heart, ensures that the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan will take place in a manner consistent with the values and aspirations of the community, including and emphasizing the community's non-traditional populations.

INDICATOR: IMPLEMENTATION

P. The Work Program section of our comprehensive plan consists primarily of specific action items that make it clear exactly what we intend to do to implement the plan.

Our Work Program consists of action items that are written so as to be specific and describe exactly what action is to be taken. As a result, each project's progress can be tracked and evaluated on a continuous basis. To view our current adopted Community Work Program, please see pp. 46-55 of the 2015 Greater Cook County Comprehensive Plan Update.

The following are some example of specific action items from the Work Program section of the current adopted Greater Cook County Comprehensive Plan.

- Maintain and upgrade stormwater systems to meet current regulatory requirements and capacity needs (p. 47).
- Renovate the old Sowega Building (p. 49).
- Refurbish and repair all old water lines within the City (p. 53).
- Dredge the oxidation pond (p. 53).

Q. Our Work Program action items clearly address local needs or goals identified in the plan

After the Goals for the current Comprehensive Plan were finalized, Issues (synonymous with Needs) and Opportunities were identified, categorized under each Goal. Subsequently, policies to address each Issue were identified, still within the framework of the 8 Goals; after that, the Community Work Program was developed with projects organized within the same framework of categories. This method helped to ensure that the Work Program action items would address the local needs/issues and goals that had been identified.

The table on the following page shows a selection of Work Program action item examples with the Issues and Goals they address. For a complete listing of Issues, please see pp. 24-28 of the current Plan Update.

Activity	Goal	Issue
Cultural Resources		
Participate in the Greater Cook County Historic Preservation Task Force when active	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive survey of historic buildings and sites has not been completed. • Cook County has many historic buildings that are empty, in poor repair, or contaminated by lead paint and/or asbestos. • Funding is not available to restore historic buildings where needed, and great resources are lost when those buildings fall into disrepair.
Economic Development		
Foster all EDC job prospecting, marketing of vacant spec buildings and land; job training & education programs	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The area does not have enough local employment opportunities. • The number of local businesses and industries needs to be increased in order to attract jobs and workforce. • In order to provide a sustainable population base and workforce, initiative needs to be taken to provide quality education and job opportunities for the younger population to minimize the desire to leave the area.
Support the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) efforts to prepare financial packages for existing and new businesses/industries	3	
Support the development of the Industrial Corridor between I-75 and US 41 through incentives and marketing	3	
Community Facilities		
Continue to maintain all roads and streets, including paving and resurfacing of dirt and asphalt facilities.	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The transportation system (street network) in Cook County is aging and is in need of major improvements.
Plan and develop a new recreational complex and expand recreational services throughout the county	8, 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation programs in Cook County are too fractured and need to be expanded with operation and coordination on a countywide level.
Intersections: Nell Purvis Rd and McConnell Bridge Rd; Evergreen Church Rd and Rountree Bridge Rd; McConnell Bridge Rd and Old Union	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The transportation system (street network) in Cook County is aging and is in need of major improvements.
Roads: Daughtrey Rutland Rd; Brushy Creek Church Rd; Beulah Church Rd; Burnett Rd; South Ave / County portion; Lydia and Green Streets; Billy Browning and William Browning Rds; Loren Rd; Roberts Rd	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The transportation system (street network) in Cook County is aging and is in need of major improvements.
Bridges: Massee Post Rd over Brushy Creek; Brushy Creek Rd over Brushy Creek; Antioch Church Rd over Little River; Barneyville Rd over Brushy Creek; Barneyville Rd over New River; Futch Rd over Lindsey Branch; Old Coffee Rd over Withlacoochee River; Boyette Rd over Bear Creek; Hutchinson Parrish over Youngs Mill; Rutland Bridge over New River; Whiddon Rowan Rd over Brushy Creek; Fellowship Rd over Hutchinson Mill Creek; Register Rd over Youngs Mill Creek; Lott Bridge Rd over Little River; Massee Post Rd over New River	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The transportation system (street network) in Cook County is aging and is in need of major improvements.

R. We have a good track record of accomplishing most of the action items included in past plan Work Programs.

Cook County places great emphasis on planning and we have used our Work Program as a guide to accomplish many projects. Of the 27 items outlined in the 2011-2015 Community Work Program, 12 (40.4%) have been completed and 7 more are in process (a total of 70.4%). In addition, 5 projects from the new 2016-2020 Work Program have already been completed, as follows:

- Coordinate with the Airport Authority to grow the airport in response to business needs
- Resurface Intersection of Nell Purvis Rd. and McConnell Bridge Rd.
- Resurface Intersection of McConnell Bridge Rd. and Old Union Rd.
- Pave South Avenue (County portion)
- Repair bridge on Old Coffee Rd. over Withlacoochee River

It is evident by the recent number of accomplishments and ongoing projects that consistent progress is being achieved towards implementing the Comprehensive Plan.

S. Our local capital budget is consistent with, and is designed to implement, the comprehensive plan.

Plan projects are incorporated into the local capital budget when they are slated for implementation. The budget contains items that are consistent with the goals and work program in the comprehensive plan, and is designed to implement the plan.

T. Provide up to ten of your best recent examples of important projects carried out as a result of the plan, with the specific plan references (attach additional sheets as needed).

Example 1: Cook County Airport

During recent years, the Cook County Airport has undergone a major expansion, steered by the Comprehensive Plan. The expansion began with the extension of the runway by an additional 1,000 feet and the addition of parallel taxiways, funded through a partnership between the County, the municipalities, and the citizens, insofar as a SPLOST was passed to provide over \$1 million in funding for these improvements. The runway extension and taxiways paved the way for further improvements. Hangars had already been identified as a need in the previous Comprehensive Plan (“Coordinate with the Airport to develop additional hangars at the airport facility”—see p. 37 of the current plan). The previous hangars generated \$6,000 per year in revenue; the new hangars have generated approximately \$36,000 annual revenue in the past year and are expected to reach the level of \$60,000 annual revenue 2 years from now. The ad valorem tax from planes housed at their airport brings in \$17,000 per year, which is the bulk of the airport’s \$21,000 annual budget.

The airport improvements were the outcome of a partnership involving the County, the Airport Authority, the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Commission, and the Cities of Adel, Cecil, Lenox, and Sparks insofar as the Cities participated in the SPLOST. The Economic Development Commission office is housed at the airport terminal. Thus, the airport project also helps to implement another action item in the Work Program: “Foster all EDC job prospecting, marketing of vacant spec buildings and land, job training, and education programs,” by supplying

the EDC with a new office location from which to conduct its operations. Additional improvements to the airport include the airport apron and a fuel station with above-ground fuel tanks. The improvements to the airport are the completion of an item listed in the Work Program of the current plan: “Coordinate with the Airport Authority to grow the airport in response to business needs.” (See Figures 6 through 9.) The hangars were paid for through a \$1.1 million USDA loan, which was paid off in 3 years rather than the anticipated 8 years, thanks to state and federal funds.



Figure 6. Cook County Airport terminal.



Figure 7. Interior of terminal building.



Figure 8. New hangars at Cook County Airport.



*Figure 9. Aerial view of the airport
(source: Google Earth)*

Example 2: SOWEGA Building

The SOWEGA (Southwest Georgia Watermelon Growers Association) Building, in Downtown Adel, is an iconic structure for the community due to Cook County's agricultural heritage and the importance of watermelons in the local agricultural economy (Adel was once named by Life Magazine as the Watermelon Capital of the World). However, by the 2000s, the SOWEGA building had fallen into complete disrepair. In 2014, the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation named the Building one of its 10 Places in Peril. Its renovation was listed as an action item in the City of Adel's Work Program (which is part of the Joint Greater Cook County Comprehensive Plan): "Renovate the old SOWEGA Building" (see p. 39).

This renovation has now been accomplished, thanks to a partnership between the County, the City of Adel, the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Cook County Chamber of Commerce, which has a new office housed in the newly renovated building. The building's location is highly significant for the County's growing agri-tourism economy: it is located at the corner of Georgia Grown Trails 37 and 41 in Downtown Adel. Thanks to sound planning and a fruitful partnership, the renovated building is now an ideal location for a mix of different uses, including commercial and residential. The SOWEGA building was highlighted under DCA's "Redevelopment Opportunities" (please see link:

<https://www.dca.ga.gov/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/programs/downloads/resourceTeam/whiteElephant/adel.pdf>) and was written up in *Georgia Trend* in April 2014 (see attached article).



Figure 10. SOWEGA Building.



Figure 11. SOWEGA Building entrance.



Figure 12. SOWEGA Building historic site plaque.

The following article from *Georgia Trend* describes the successful partnership that led to the renovation of the SOWEGA building.

Four For The Future: Adel And Cook County

Adel Chamber of Commerce/Cook County Economic Development Commission

Published in *Georgia Trend*, April 2014 (<http://www.georgiatrend.com/April-2014/Four-For-The-Future/>)

Agriculture plays big in Cook County, and the history of this south Georgia county is reflected in the windows of the 1930s SOWEGA building in downtown Adel.

The three-story structure served as the headquarters of the Southwest Georgia Watermelon Growers Association (SOWEGA) until the 1950s. According to Jerry Connell, president of the Cook County Chamber of Commerce, which today owns the building and occupies the first floor, it was the largest agricultural cooperative in the world at that time.

“It’s an iconic place in our community,” he says. “Everyone has a SOWEGA building story.”

In fact, Adel itself was named by *Life* magazine in the 1930s as the Watermelon Capital of the World.

But once I-75 was built in the mid 20th century, people no longer stopped and visited on their way through South Georgia. Instead they zoomed by, unaware the town existed save for its name on an exit sign. The downtown, too, started to decline.

But since that time, Adel and Cook County have found that revitalization comes through partnership, and today it has a number of initiatives that are moving the county forward.

The SOWEGA building stands at the intersection of U.S. 41 and Georgia Highway 37 and lies on a new agritourism trail that is winding through South Georgia.

The Georgia General Assembly designated Highway 37, which extends from Homerville in the east to Ft. Gaines in the west, as the Georgia Grown Trail. Along the way, there will be more than 40 places to taste, buy, see and participate in Georgia's produce, including in Adel. The newly formed Georgia Grown Trail 37 Association is working with communities along the trail.

"The association is key to marketing the trail," says Connell, who is also president of the association. "This is the first ever Georgia Grown Trail. We want the branding to be consistent."

He says that billboards, a website and brochure are in the works, as well as highway markers and even a smartphone app.

"Tourism is economic development, and agritourism is economic development," Connell says. "What we find so attractive about the trail is that it only runs through small towns, giving those small towns the opportunity to have what we hope will be a very viable agritourism attraction."

Agritourism isn't the only thing driving Cook County forward.

"The key to success of Cook County over the last 11 years has been its remarkable ability to form partnerships," says Lisa Collins, director of the Cook County Economic Development Commission (EDC).

She cites recent upgrades at the Cook County Airport, which include a new terminal, with future plans involving a fuel tank farm, apron taxi lane and new hangers.

The airport authority partnered with the EDC to develop a marketing plan, which resulted in a OneGeorgia grant for the new terminal. Additional grants and local funding were also earmarked for the airport, and today it's home to the EDC's new offices.

In another partnership of sorts, the city, county and the development authority all worked together to help the South Cook Industrial Park become a Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) designated site, one of only 30 in the state.

"Having those three entities willing to cooperate and be at the same table is a huge shot in the arm for growing a community," Collins says.

Back in Adel, The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation named the SOWEGA Building one of its 10 Places in Peril in 2014 due to water leakage damaging the upper stories of the structure.

"The structure has great bones," Connell says. "But the upstairs is not used because the ceiling is falling in and the windows are cracked."

Neither the chamber nor the city could afford the needed repairs, so another partnership could help save the structure.

"We partnered this year with The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation to do a feasibility study to find possibilities of what the building can be used for," Connell says, adding that the Trust doesn't come in with hammers and nails, but rather assistance in finding resources.

With green "watermelons" dotting the façade, the SOWEGA building is a local landmark and a reflection of where Adel has been and what it has to look forward to, so saving the building is important for this community.

“The 3,500 members all marketed watermelons throughout the nation and the world,” Connell says. “We still grow plenty of watermelons along the Georgia Grown Trail 37.” – MJ

This article appears in the [April 2014](#) issue of Georgia Trend

Example 3: Workforce Development Center

A key item in the Cook County Comprehensive Plan Work Program is to “Foster job training and education programs” (see p. 46). One project carried out as a result of this action item was the expansion of Wiregrass Georgia Technical College’s campus, located in the City of Sparks. This new 8,000-square-foot addition to the Cook County Workforce Development Center houses new library space, classrooms, and space for the General Maintenance Mechanic Technical Certificate of Credit. The program started spring semester 2015. The project was implemented through \$800,000 in OneGeorgia and EIP grant funds, along with financial support from the Cook County Economic Development Commission and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College Foundation South. The Workforce Development Center provides training in skills applicable for the local and regional economy, such as the General Maintenance Mechanic program. (Please see attached article.)



Figure 13. Workforce Development Center.



Figure 14. Addition to the Workforce Development Center.

The following article from the Cook County EDC website describes the success of the Workforce Development Center expansion.

Workforce Development Center offers new programs

By: Charles Shiver

From the Cook County EDC Website: <http://cookcountyedc.com/news/article/112>

Well-wishers from across the area turned out last fall for an open house and ribbon cutting ceremony for the Cook County Workforce Development Center's (WDC) 8,000-square-foot addition in Sparks.

The expansion of Wiregrass Georgia Technical College's campus provides new library space, classrooms, and space for the General Maintenance Mechanic Technical Certificate of Credit. The program started spring semester 2015.

Holly Greene, the WDC's associate vice president for operations, said Wiregrass Georgia officials are working hard to get the word out and continue to grow the General Maintenance Mechanic program. This semester, high school students in the Move On When Ready (dual enrollment) program enrolled in the Wiregrass Georgia program.

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College President Dr. Tina Anderson said \$800,000 in grant funds helped build the addition, along with financial support from the Cook County Economic Development Commission and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College Foundation South. The successfully completed project shows Wiregrass Georgia's long-term commitment to this community, Dr. Anderson said.

The WDC expansion is proof that little Cook County can have as high quality programs and facilities as those in much larger communities by everyone working together, said County Commission Chairman Michael Dinnerman. In fact, he said, "Adel-Cook County will outwork you."

The WDC produces well-skilled and educated workers, which allows the community to recruit, retain, and grow industry, Dinnerman said. He added that the higher the skills possessed by laborers, the better their jobs and the higher their pay are.

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College is "doing what we need you to do in Cook County" to help with job growth and economic development, he said. He, too, applauded all parties involved in the center expansion.

"My grandfather once said, 'The road of opportunity has been paved with gold,' " Dinnerman said. "It's up to you, the citizens, to pick it up."

This semester, the Workforce Development Center has started offering the Business Management program on-campus. Previously, the program has been offered online or in the classroom at other Wiregrass Georgia campuses.

The State now offers a new tax credit benefit for businesses that educate workers so they can successfully complete their GED requirements.

Please see related stories on the Business Management program and business tax credit.

For information about programs offered by Wiregrass Georgia Technical College, please call (229) 549-7368, or look on their website at www.wiregrass.edu.

Example 4: Walmart Supercenter

The effort to bring a new Walmart Supercenter to Cook County was guided by three items in the Work Program:

- Foster all EDC job prospecting, marketing of vacant spec buildings and land; job training & education programs
- Support the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) efforts to prepare financial packages for existing and new businesses/industries
- Support the development of the Industrial Corridor between I-75 and US 41 through incentives and marketing

The 129,000-square-foot building is expected to bring 200 new jobs to the area. The grand opening is scheduled for April 20, 2016. Due to the Supercenter's strategic location, it is believed to be the most easily accessible Walmart along I-75 from Atlanta to Orlando.



Figure 15. Walmart Supercenter under construction. Image source: Google Earth.

Example 5: Natural Gas Line Extension

“Extend the natural gas lines” is a Work Program item in the current Comprehensive Plan (see p. 50). 12.5 miles of new natural gas lines, including 3 miles of mains, are now under construction. The new gas lines, extended from the City of Adel, run through the Cities of Lenox and Sparks and will serve residential customers, farms, poultry operations, and asphalt plants in northern Cook County.

Cook County Commissioners

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Plan First Program
Georgia Department of Community Affairs
60 Executive Park South, NE
Atlanta, Georgia 30329-223

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing this letter in support of Cook County's application for designation as a PlanFirst Community by the Department of Community Affairs.

Cook County has successfully adopted and implemented its Comprehensive Plans for numerous years, using it as guidance for growth and development decisions since the early 1990s but even more so after the adoption of its most current Comprehensive Plan in 2015. Throughout the State of Georgia, Cook County is known as an economic hub due to the growth and development it has seen along the I-75/US-41 corridor, as well as being known for its planning and redevelopment efforts and for providing its citizens a good quality of life.. There is no doubt that good planning and hard work played a major role in that distinction.

During the process of developing a new five-year update to the Comprehensive Plan, many diverse stakeholders, representatives of a wide range of organizations, elected and appointed officials, agencies, authorities, and many citizens have had the opportunity to participate and provide input on the future needs of the County. It is through such planning efforts that new developments have been planned, built, redeveloped, or preserved.

The efforts of the County throughout the years, not only to prepare Comprehensive Plans, but to follow through with the plans, is greatly appreciated and the results are certainly evident in our community. Cook County is a perfect candidate for the PlanFirst Designation.

Sincerely yours,



Randy Lane, Chairman
Board of Commissioners, Cook County

CC: File.

Debra Robinson, Commissioner – District 1
Michael Dinnerman, Commissioner – District 2
Jeff Lane, Commissioner – District 3
Randy Lane, Commissioner – District 4
Dwight E. Purvis, Commissioner – District 5

Mrs. Faye Hughes, County Administrator
Mrs. Vicki S. Parrish, County Clerk
Daniel Connell, County Attorney
Chris Davis, Building/Zoning Administrator